

## The Lexical Temporal Properties of Nominal Predicates

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This work presents theoretical arguments and experimental evidence for an important distinction between two classes of temporal nominal predicates. We separate nouns like *fugitive* in (1), which can be evaluated at a time distinct from the verbal tense, from nouns like *bachelor* in (2), which must be evaluated at the same time as the verbal predicate.

- (1) A fugitive is doing time.                      (2) # A bachelor is kissing his wife.

A number of previous theories have discussed the difference between *temporally dependent* and *independent* noun phrases (Enç 1981, a.o.; Musan 1999, a.o.; Keshet 2008). These theories claim that *temporally independent* noun phrases can be evaluated at any time, while *temporally dependent* noun phrases are interpreted at the same time as the main verbal predicate of their clause. All of these theories claim that noun phrases are only temporally dependent if dependence is conditioned by their syntactic environment (e.g. existential there constructions). None of these theories can explain the difference in acceptability between (1) and (2), where the syntactic environments are (more or less) identical. Previous accounts predict that *fugitive* and *bachelor* should both be temporally independent.

The proposal that there are two clearly separated groups of nominal predicates is supported by novel experimental data in which the acceptable evaluation times for the two noun classes were shown to be significantly different. 26 native English speakers were given short stories which established the evaluation times of a nominal and a verbal predicate. They were then asked to judge the acceptability of a sentence containing the target nominal and verbal predicates. As predicted, *bachelor*-like nouns were only acceptable when evaluated at the verbal evaluation time, while *fugitive*-like nouns were significantly more acceptable at all other evaluation times.

This presentation will discuss the various potential semantic explanations for the distinction between these two groups of nominal predicates. The merits of two theories in particular will be discussed at length. The first is that every nominal predicate denotes either a stage-level or individual-level properties (Carlson 1977a,b). Musan’s (1999) analysis claims that the syntactic environments which condition temporal dependency do so because they also confine nominal predicates to a stage-level interpretation. We discuss the possibility that *bachelor*-type nominals inherently denote a stage-level property, while *fugitive*-type nominals denote individual-level properties. If true, we would be left with a one-to-one correlation between stage-level interpretation and temporal dependency.

Additionally, we will discuss whether the existence of social roles may grant temporal independence to nominal predicates, citing proposals in the computational knowledge representation literature (e.g. Masolo et al 2004). In this theory, *bachelor*-like nouns denote only a temporal slice of the life of the entity, while *fugitive*-like nouns additionally describe a social role that the entity plays. Because *fugitive*-like nouns are not lexically defined purely along a temporal dimension, they are more resistant to temporal manipulation. The presence of a social component in the meaning of the nominal allows a semi-permanent status for these predicates.

In summary, we will present novel experimental data which supports a separation between two classes of nominal predicates, based on their temporal behavior. We will then discuss the merits for various semantic theories which may explain the distinction.